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ABSTRACT

A study measuring perceptions of participants in social studies textbook adoption for Georgia school districts investigated how participants' attitudes and perceptions correlated with textbook adoption. It was hypothesized that school systems would adopt new social studies materials which were perceived by members of the textbook adoption committees to be high in relative advantage, compatability, trialability, observability, and low in complexity for teachers and students. The method was to analyze 289 materials information questionnaires sent out to 384 people who served on social studies textbook adoption committees in Georgia school systems in 1977. Questions concerned innovative materials which were rejected by the committees as well as materials which were adopted. Findings indicated strong correlations in expected directions between respondents' perceptions that: (1) the material was better than previous material; (2) student learning would be greater; (3) the approach or methods were needed; (4) learning would be observable to the teacher; and (5) teachers and students would be willing to adopt the new material. Additional research is recommended on processes of educational decision making. (Author/IE)

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The Adoption of New Social Studies Textbooks in Georgia: A Case Study of Innovation Diffusion

by

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Background to the Problem

Researchers and developers are actively generating new knowledge, new approaches and new materials for use in social studies classes, but little is known about the impact those R and D efforts have on practice. The extent to which research on concept learning, moral development, inquiry teaching and political socialization is used in the nation's classrooms is not known. A few studies on the utilization of "the new social studies" curriculum projects of the 1960s indicate little use of the products of R and D (Switzer, 1974; Turner and Haley, 1977; Walker, 1974; Wells, 1973; Weidner, 1972; Guenther and Dumas, 1973; Hahn, 1977a).

In order to understand the process by which new knowledge and new programs reach the potential users of that knowledge and those programs, we can test the applicability of principles about the diffusion of innovations to our particular field. Research on the diffusion of innovations in various fields emphasized the importance of perceived characteristics of innovations on the adoption of those innovations.

In summarizing the diffusion literature, Rogers and Shoemaker (1974) suggested that innovations which were perceived to be high in relative advantage, compatibility, observability, and trialability and low in complexity would most likely be adopted.

"Relative advantage is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supercedes," said Rogers and Shoemaker (1974, p. 138). Further, they said:

> "...relative advantage, in one sense, indicates the intensity of the reward or punishment resulting from adoption of an innovation. There are undoubtedly a number of subdimensions of relative advantage: the degree of economic profitability, low initial cost, lower perceived risk, a decrease in discomfort, a savings in time and efforts, and the immediacy of the reward. This latter factor perhaps explains why preventive innovations have an especially low rate of adoption. Such ideas as buying insurance, using auto seat belts, getting innoculation against disease, adopting birth control methods,. . . are examples." (p. 139)

Studies on the diffusion of innovations indicated that perceptions of low initial cost, low continuing cost, little risk, and good profits had positive correlations with the adoption of innovations.

Compatibility, observability and trialability had also been found to have positive correlations with adoption of innovations. Compatibility is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the salient existing values, past experiences, and needs of the receivers (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1974, p. 145). Trialability is the degree to which an innovation may be tried on a small scale or limited basis (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1974, p. 155). Observability is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1974, p. 155).

Complexity, which had a negative correlation with innovation adoption, is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand or use (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1974, p. 154).

In an earlier study, (Hahn, 1977b) it was found that while several subdimensions of those five categories were related to whether or not social studies teachers said they would like to use

new social studies curriculum projects, there was no relationship between perceived characteristics and actual use. That is, people continued to use materials they did not like and they did not use new curriculum project materials which they reported liking. As a result of that study, it appeared that textbook adoption policies (which are found in 23 states and at the district level in other states) create a situation in which educators are not able to replace materials they do not like with innovative ones they prefer.

The purpose of this study was to measure the perceptions of people who participated in textbook adoption decisions soon after the decision was made in order to seek answers to the following questions:

1. Are potential adopter's perceptions of new social studies materials related to their attitudes toward those materials?
2. Are potential adopters' perceptions of new social studies materials related to adoption of those materials?
3. Do potential adopters' attitudes toward new materials correlate with adoption of those materials in their schools?
4. What perceptions of new materials have the strongest and weakest correlations with positive and negative attitudes toward social studies materials?

Hypotheses

Adapting the general research on innovation adoption to an educational setting, this study focused on social studies textbook adoption in Georgia in the Spring of 1977. In particular, it was hypothesized that school systems would adopt new social studies materials which members of the textbook adoption committees perceived would:

1. Be high in relative advantage.
    1.1 Be better than what they used before.
    1.2 Be low in cost.
    1.3 Be low in risk.
    1.4 Be low in time demands.
    1.5 Increase student interest.
    1.6 Increase student learning.
2. Be high in compatibility.
    2.1 Be compatible with school needs for package, content and approach.
    2.2 Be compatible with previous experience.
    2.3 Be compatible with values.
3. Be high in trialability.
4. Be high in observability.
5. Be low in complexity for teachers and students.

Procedures

The social studies materials considered in this study were those for grades 1-12 in social studies which had been approved by

the Georgia Textbook Commission in November, 1974, and which were published on the Georgia Textbook List. School districts can use state monies to purchase materials from that list.

To measure potential adopters' perceptions of attributes of social studies materials, the Materials Information Questionnaire was used. This instrument was used in earlier studies, and the content validity, construct validity, and test retest reliability were previously determined to be acceptable (Hahn, 1977b).

Decision makers were identified by randomly selecting two school systems from each of the regions included in the 16 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA's). Calls were made to the curriculum coordinators of the selected systems. If the coordinators reported that their system went through the process of textbook adoption in the Spring, they were asked for names of people who served on the textbook selection committees and questionnaires were sent to those individuals. If the system did not adopt social studies texts that year, it was replaced by another system, drawn randomly, which did undergo the process. In four CESA's, no systems were identified in which textbook adoption took place and schools were still in session at the end of May. In addition to systems in the 12 regions, which serve predominantly small towns and rural areas, calls were also made to the six systems in large metropolitan areas which are not in CESA's. Four of those systems underwent textbook adoption and were able to participate in the study. In all, 384 questionnaires were sent to people who served on social

studies textbook adoption committees in Georgia school systems in the Spring of 1977. Since the adoption process was not completed until late in the school year, questionnaires were sent just shortly before school was closing. As a result, only 120, or 30 percent, of the sample returned questionnaires and there was not sufficient time to send reminders.

Individuals were asked to complete questionnaires on several materials they examined, preferably some which were adopted and some which were rejected by their committee. Since this study was concerned with "innovations," questionnaires on materials which had been used in the past and were therefore not new to the respondents were not analyzed. As a result, of this process, 289 questionnaires were analyzed to test the hypotheses of this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

Kendall tau correlations between potential adopters' perceptions of the social studies materials and their willingness to adopt the materials, or attitude, were computed. The correlations between perceptions, as measured by items 1-28 on the questionnaire, and attitude, as measured by item 29, are reported in Table 1.

There were strong positive correlations between perceptions that the material was better than the previous material, that there was low risk of lessons failing, that student learning would be greater, that the package, content, and approach or methods were needed, that it fit a course, that it taught valued things, and that learning would be observable to the teacher with the potential adopters' willingness to adopt new materials, as had been hypothesized.

Table 1. Correlations Between Potential Adopters' Perceptions of New Social Studies Materials and Their Attitudes Toward Those Materials

Hypothesis	Item on Materials Information Questionnaire	Correlation with Attitude[a] (n)
1.1	18 Better than previous material	.61 (216)[c]
1.2	22 Initial cost low	.06 (203)
1.2	10 Continuing cost low[b]	.24 (211)[c]
1.3	5 Low risk in community[b]	.17 (220)[d]
1.3	15 Low risk on standardized tests[b]	.29 (217)[c]
1.3	17 Low risk of lessons failing[b]	.42 (219)[c]
1.4	11 Little teacher time and effort--at first[b]	.19 (217)[c]
1.4	16 Little teacher time and effort--continuously[b]	.29 (217)[c]
1.5	1 Student interest greater	.59 (220)[c]
1.6	14 Student learning greater	.53 (216)[c]
2.1	2 Package needed	.44 (220)[c]
2.1	6 Approach or methods needed	.38 (218)[c]
2.1	19 Content needed	.59 (220)[c]
2.1	23 Fits a course	.56 (221)[c]
2.2	13 Content similar	.14 (219)[d]
2.2	20 Approach similar	.21 (219)[c]
2.3	24 Teaches valued things	.63 (220)[c]
3	12 Limited experiment possible	.08 (213)
3	26 Trial on small scale possible[b]	.12 (214)[d]
4	3 Observalbe to other teachers[b]	.21 (204)[c]
4	8 Results observable to parents	.37 (211)[c]
4	28 Learning observable to teacher	.54 (209)[c]
5	27 Not easy for teachers to understand	-.45 (163)[c]

Continued . . .

Table 1. Continued

Hypothesis	Item on Materials Information Questionnaire	Correlation with Attitude[a] (n)
5	7 Difficult for teachers to use	-.42 (220)[c]
5	9 Reading level difficult	-.24 (218)[c]
5	21 Tasks difficult for students	-.28 (218)[c]
5	24 Content difficult for students	-.33 (220)[c]
5	4 Teacher needs special skills	-.17 (218)[d]

[a]Cases with missing data were not included.

[b]Direction of responses were reversed so that correlations would correspond with hypotheses.

[c]Significant at the .01 level.

[d]Significant at the .05 level.

There were positive correlations between perceptions of low continuing cost, low risk in the community and on standardized tests, that it required little continuing teacher time and effort, that the approach was similar to something previously used, and that the results of using it are observable, but the correlations were not very strong.

There were negative correlations between dimensions of complexity and attitude, as hypothesized. There were little or no significant correlations between attitude and perceptions of low initial cost, little time and effort required, similarity of content with something previously used, and trialability on a small scale.

The relationships between perceptions and actual adoption of materials by school systems were also analyzed. Kendall tau correlations between perceptions, as measured by items 1-28 on the questionnaire, and adoption as measured by item 30 were used to test the appropriate hypotheses (Table 2).

Weak positive correlations were found between adoption and perceptions that the material was better than what had been used previously, that there was little risk in using the materials, that student learning and student interest would increase, that the approach, package and content was needed, that it teaches valued things, and that learning is observable.

There were weak negative correlations between dimensions of complexity and adoption.

Table 2. Correlations Between Potential Adopters' Perceptions of New Social Studies Materials and Adoption of Those Materials by Their Schools

Hypothesis	Item on Materials Information Questionnaire	Correlation With Adoption[a](n)
1.1	18 Better than previous material	.21 (219)[c]
1.2	22 Initial cost low	-.02 (205)
1.2	10 Continuing cost low[b]	.09 (224)
1.3	5 Low risk in community[b]	.16 (235)[d]
1.3	15 Low risk on standardized tests[b]	.13 (229)[d]
1.3	17 Low risk of lessons failing[b]	.12 (224)[d]
1.4	11 Little teacher time and effort at first[b]	.09 (233)
1.4	16 Little teacher time and effort continuously[b]	.09 (232)
1.5	1 Student interest greater	.26 (231)[c]
1.6	14 Student learning greater	.17 (232)[d]
2.1	2 Package needed	.19 (236)[c]
2.1	6 Approach or methods needed	.20 (233)[c]
2.1	19 Content needed	.34 (223)[c]
2.1	23 Fits a course	.32 (227)[c]
2.2	13 Content similar	.07 (235)
2.2	20 Approach similar	.14 (224)[c]
2.3	25 Teaches valued things	.27 (225)[c]
3	12 Limited experiment possible	.04 (227)
3	26 Trial on small scale possible[b]	.06 (216)
4	3 Observable to other teachers[b]	.07 (219)
4	8 Results observable to parents	.13 (225)[d]
4	28 Learning observable to teacher	.21 (211)[c]
5	27 Not easy for teachers to understand[b]	-.27 (167)

Hypothesis	Item on Materials Information Questionnaire	Correlation with Adoption[a] (n)
5	7 Difficult for teachers to use	-.21 (235)[c]
5	9 Reading level difficult	-.13 (235)[d]
5	21 Tasks difficult for students	-.12 (224)[d]
5	24 Content difficult for students	-.20 (225)[c]
5	4 Teacher needs special skills	-.11 (234)[d]

[a]Cases with missing data were not included.

[b]Direction of responses was reversed so that correlations would correspond with hypotheses.

[c]Significant at the .01 level.

[d]Significant at the .05 level.

Correlations between potential adopters' attitudes and adoption of the new materials were also computed and compared to the similar correlation obtained in the 1974 study of new secondary social studies projects (Hahn, 1977a) and are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlations Between Potential Adopters' Attitudes Toward New Social Studies Materials and Adoption of Those Materials by the Potential Adopters' Schools in Georgia

Sample	Correlation Between Attitude & Adoption
"New Social Studies" Curriculum Projects--1974	-.07 (n=116)
New Social Studies Textbooks--1977	.35 (n=211)*

*Significant at the .01 level.

There was a closer relationship between attitudes and adoption when decision-makers' perceptions of new textbooks were measured near to the time of textbook adoption than there was in the earlier study. However, it is surprising that the reported attitudes of decision-makers is not more closely related to adoption. Are there factors which influence adoption decisions other than the attitudes of the decision-makers toward the innovations?

Responses to an open ended item, "what was the main reason for your school adopting or not adopting the materials?" were examined. Most of those responses reinforced the objective items. Fit with existing courses, ease of understanding and compatibility with values were most frequently mentioned.

However, three other explanations were also suggested by open

responses. A few people noted that materials were not adopted because of the nature of a single textbook adoption: among several desirable alternatives, all but the most desirable had to be eliminated. Other people noted that materials which were adopted by the system-wide committee on which they served were not adopted by their particular school. A third explanation was suggested by the few people who reported that the personality of the publisher's representative was influential.

Assumptions and Limitations

This approach to analyzing educational decisions assumes that the process is rational. While studies have found that farmers and doctors adopt innovations which have low risk, high returns, low cost, which are compatible with their needs and values, which are trialable on a small scale, which produce observable results and which they like, educators may adopt educational materials for other, less rational reasons. Secondly, the survey method assumes that people are aware of their perceptions and that they are reporting them honestly. That may not be the case. Thirdly, this study assumes that if people say "if it was up to me, I would like to use this material" that they did in fact recommend its adoption, and that adoption decisions are made on a one person, one vote basis. It is possible that an individual felt pressure from influential people or felt an obligation to select materials that would be preferred by the majority of decision-makers or of teacher users regardless of the individual's attitude toward the material. It would be useful

to ask if the individual would like to use the material, and if he or she recommended its adoption. But because school systems carefully guard the secret votes, it is not likely that one will be able to ask the latter question.

The results of this study are limited by the fact that questionnaires were returned by only 30 percent of the decision-makers. Because schools closed for the summer soon after adoption decisions were made, there was no opportunity for follow-up. And due to the secret nature of the decisions it is not possible to determine if the other seventy percent of the decision-makers held the attitudes which determined the outcome of the vote. To overcome this difficulty, in future studies researchers should ask all members of a single committee to complete questionnaires on the spot. With all voters present, one would expect the attitudes of the majority to correlate with the adoption decision, unless, as suggested above, people vote for what they think others would like rather than their own preferences. To overcome that, one might ask (1) would you like to use this? (2) would most of the teachers who will be using the material like it? (3) do the people who are influential on you like it? and (4) was it adopted?

Another limitation of this study is that factors other than perceived characteristics cannot be identified. If I like three textbooks very much but I must select only one, for two I will report positive attitudes but no adoption, and only in the third case will attitude match adoption. It is also possible that although

people like one new textbook, they will vote to keep the old one so they have to purchase fewer copies and can save money in social studies and use it to purchase more textbooks in a higher priority area. If the textbook representative's personality or friendship influences the decision, that too cannot be measured by the study. A case study approach, using interviews with decision-makers and observations of committee meetings might enable one to identify factors such as these.

Implications and Recommendations

Because potential adopters' attitudes toward new social studies materials in both this study of textbook adoption for grades 1-12 and in the earlier study of secondary social studies curriculum projects (Hahn, 1977a, b) were influenced by whether there are observable increases in student interest and student learning and whether the new material meets the schools' needs and are compatible with their values, developers and change agents should make objectives and evaluation data available to potential adopters of social studies materials. Further, change agents and developers should demonstrate to potential adopters how they can minimize costs, risks and the complexity of using new materials if they want potential adopters to develop favorable attitudes toward new social studies materials.

Further studies are needed to determine whether those perceptions are important to attitudes toward materials in other curriculum areas like mathematics or reading. And additional studies are needed to determine if attitudes toward idea and practice type

innovations are affected similarly to attitudes toward product innovations.

The fact that there are not stronger correlations between perceptions of and attitudes toward new materials' actual adoption when decision makers are studied near the time of decision may reflect a methodological problem. Earlier research on diffusion of innovations focused on individual decisions made by farmers, homemakers and doctors. A single decision in education results from the collective decisions of many people who have differential power. One would need to weight the perceptions of the many decision-makers to accurately reflect the process.

It is also possible that in education perceived characteristics are of less importance relative to other factors than they are in other areas. With many goals competing for the allocation of scarce resources, school system priorities may override all other considerations. Regardless of the inherent value or demonstrated effect of a new social studies program, it may not receive resources which go first to bringing about racial balance or improved scores on standardized tests. Again, case studies might offer insights to environmental factors which influence the adoption of innovations in education.

The correlations between perceptions and adoption and between attitude and adoption were stronger when people who participated in social studies textbook adoption decisions were studied close to the time of decision than when perceptions of people who did not

necessarily participate in textbook adoption decisions were studied several years after textbook adoption had taken place. This suggests that the textbook adoption cycle does affect whether desired innovative materials are in use at a given point in time. Further studies are needed to determine the effect textbook adoption policies have on the diffusion of innovations in social studies. If adopted texts do not reflect recent research on concept learning, moral development, and political socialization, research is not likely to be translated into classroom practices.

If the academic community really wants educators to use research based knowledge, then perhaps we should take lessons from the effective diffusers--the marketing people. A dominant value that research is more moral than is profit has created a "closed area" for our inquiries. If research is to lead to improved practice in social studies, research on the diffusion of innovations, which includes research on textbook adoption and on the complex processes of educational decision-making must be placed on our research agenda.

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